

8/21/2006 This Week in Congress

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August 21, 2006

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Recognizing Residents of Burns with "Building Better Communities" Award

This week, I recognized Burns with a "Building Better Communities" award for taking steps over the course of many years to ensure the future of the community is a bright one. Burns, with a population of about 450 people, is located in Marion County. I presented the award to Mayor Mary Glenn.

In May, residents transformed the former post office into a new community library and city hall. The Burns Public Library Board raised more than \$95,000 from private sources to cover project expenses, with approximately half coming from local and area residents. In March 2003, a new community center was completed that includes a wellness center, youth room and kitchen. During the center's five-month construction period, crews of volunteers worked on the center on a daily basis.

In an effort to promote the community, the Burns PRIDE committee sold two-foot tall concrete roosters to local businesses and residents. In all, more than 60 roosters were sold, decorated and are on display. The local Lions Club purchased a four-foot tall rooster that serves as a welcome sign on the way into town.

Since 1954, families in Burns have hosted international students in their homes over the Thanksgiving holiday to give them a chance to experience life in rural America. The community was recognized in 1959 by Vice President Richard Nixon and received a Distinguished Service Award from the Institute of International Education. Over the last 52 years, more than 500 people representing 110 countries have visited Burns.

After the presentation, I visited the new community library and city hall with Carol Callahan, Burns City Clerk. David Ferren, an active member of the local Lions Club, also provided me with a tour of the Burns School, which was opened in 1904 as the first consolidated grade and high school in Kansas. The building now serves as the Burns Community Museum. Residents are attempting to secure funding to renovate the building.

I commend the citizens of Burns and the surrounding area. Hard work, vision and community support will continue to carry Burns forward. For the full text of my speech, [click here](#).

Breaking Ground on U.S. Highway 54 and Visiting Liberal Agriculture Businesses

On Monday, I attended a groundbreaking event west of Liberal to celebrate the start of construction to widen U.S. Highway 54 to four lanes for the four-mile stretch of road to the Oklahoma state border. Joining me were Kansas Department of Transportation Secretary Deb Miller, Liberal Mayor Ronnie Warren, Seward County Commission Chairman Shannon Francis, and other KDOT officials, Terry Heidner, Jerry Younger and Mark Taylor.

In 1997, I was able to secure federal funds to make Highway 54 four lanes from the Oklahoma state line to the City of Liberal. This is a heavily traveled stretch of Highway 54 and I was anxious to demonstrate the safety and commercial needs could be addressed for once starting in the west and moving east. Last year's highway bill includes funding for Highway 54 from Kingman to Pratt.

Much of the credit for this project goes to the Southwest Passage Initiative for Regional and Interstate Transportation (SPIRIT) organization. This organization consists of many active citizens, including Max Zimmerman and Jack Taylor, whose overall goal is the expansion of all of U.S. Highway 54 to four lanes from Wichita to El Paso, Texas. This project is a step in the right direction in providing southwest Kansas with safe and reliable roads that connect with the rest of the country.

Also while in Liberal, I visited with cotton producers at Plains Cotton Cooperative. I also visited the site of the new ethanol plant being built in Seward County. The topic of conversation at the site was truck and rail transportation. This ethanol plant, Arkalon Energy, is being developed by Conestoga Energy Partners. Nick Hatcher, President of Conestoga, and Dusty Turner, Vice President of Conestoga, hosted Secretary Miller and me.

Speaking at the K-State Department of Agricultural Economics Risk and Profit Seminar

On Thursday, I joined a few hundred agricultural producers and agribusiness managers in Manhattan for the Kansas State University Department of Agricultural Economics annual Risk and Profit conference. The theme of the conference was "Agricultural Policy in the 21st Century."

I spoke to the group about current agriculture issues such as the ongoing drought and factors that will influence the 2007 Farm Bill, including budget constraints and current trade negotiations taking place. Congress needs to write a farm bill that meets the needs of America's farmers and expect our World Trade Organization negotiators to work within that system. Given the current atmosphere of rising fuel, fertilizer and other inputs, it may also become necessary to devise a safety net to protect farmers and ranchers against disproportionate increases in input costs. I appreciated Dr. Sean Fox, Interim Head of the Department of Agricultural Economics, and Dr. James Mintert, Department Professor and Extension State Leader, for the invitation and hosting me at the event.

This weekend brought a change in our family's household. We moved our daughter into dorm life at K-State. We are excited about the educational opportunities that await our college student and appreciate all the efforts made by our teachers and administrators in the Hays School District. We are grateful to live in Kansas where educational opportunity is a high priority. We know many Kansans and their families are experiencing the change that comes with beginning college and we wish all students and faculty a great school year.

Hillsboro to Upgrade Treatment System with USDA Rural Development Funds

I joined U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development State Director Chuck Banks this week in presenting the City of Hillsboro with a check for \$5,302,500 for improvements to the city's wastewater treatment system. The funding will be utilized to develop a lagoon system to replace the existing treatment plant to include piping, control structures and a lift station.

Funding for the project, provided through the USDA's Water and Waste Disposal Program, will benefit the population of about 3,000 in this Marion county community. USDA Rural Development offers many valuable programs that can help communities and rural businesses overcome some of the challenges faced in rural Kansas. Congratulations to Mayor Delores Dalke, the City of Hillsboro and its leaders for successfully moving this important project forward.

Speaking at the Harvey County Annual Farm Bureau Meeting

I attended the Harvey County Farm Bureau Association annual meeting this week in Newton. About 140 people from the area attended the meeting Tuesday evening in Our Lady of Guadalupe Hall. I discussed the need for educating Members of Congress from urban areas on the challenges rural America faces. It is a constant battle to inform these Members why programs are needed and why funding levels should be maintained. We also discussed protection of farm land from urban sprawl, which is a big issue in Harvey County.

I appreciated the hospitality of the group, including Neal Williams, President, Larry Goering, Vice President, Barbara Roux, Secretary/Treasurer, and Beverly Fast, Women's Chair, as well as David Wendling, Gary Harms, Ed Busenitz, Daniel Rohr, Allen Nickel and Dwayne Roux.

Congratulations to this year's Harvey County award recipients:

Farm Family - Craig and Brenda Ewy

Century Farm - Brad Kaufman and Cindy Kaufman Bartel

KFB Distinguished Service Award - Lois Schlickau

Discussing Energy and Immigration with the McPherson Rotary Club

On Tuesday, I had the opportunity to speak to the McPherson Rotary Club. I shared with the group the work being done in Washington, D.C., to encourage renewable fuel use and production. We also discussed immigration reform. An agreement has not been reached between the U.S. House and Senate, which passed two dramatically different bills. I shared my continued support of the House-passed bill, which deals with the problems at our border by giving our border patrol the tools they need without providing amnesty.

Viewing Recent Renovations of Russell Regional Hospital

Shelley Boden, the Interim Administrator and CEO of Russell Regional Hospital, provided me with a tour of the hospital on Wednesday to view recent renovations and visit the long-term care area. Significant improvements have been made to the hospital, including a new physical therapy area. I was also impressed with the staff, who exhibited their commitment to quality care. It was clear the leadership of Russell Regional Hospital has been effective in creating quality hospital facilities and dedicated staff.

In the Office

Service members with the Kansas Air National Guard were in the office this week to provide an update on activities in the state. In with the group from Topeka were Lt. Col. Tony DeJesus, Lt. Eric Webb, Lt. Tanya Wehrli and Capt. Chris Hill, as were Lt. Col. Derek Rogers of Lawrence and Ryan Strong of Baldwin. They discussed the Guard's plans to enhance the capabilities of the Smoky Hill Range outside of Salina and efforts to increase unmanned aerial vehicle operations. They also shared their thoughts on provisions in the 2007 Defense Authorization Act now before Congress, including improved benefits and greater power for the National Guard within the Pentagon.

Kansans in my office this week for a tour of the U.S. Capitol included Jeff and Linda Van Der Weele of Prairie View with their son, Philip, and son-in-law and daughter, Aaron and Priscilla Mizell of Salina. Kerry and Juneil McQueen of Liberal also brought their grandson, Cole Lorenzen, of Smith Center by for a tour.

Very truly yours,

Jerry